



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

EUROPEAN  
FOREIGN  
POLICY  
UNIT



European Foreign Policy Unit  
Working Paper No. 2008/3

ITALIAN FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE  
COLD WAR

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June 2008

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## Abstract

This essay analyses the evolution of Italian foreign policy in the fields of both security and economy over recent decades. The first part presents a five-rank typology of Western states' foreign policy, constructed on ten different variables, which specify the crucial factors for each different rank. According to this framework, after 1994 Italy's 'second republic' is characterised as a small power, while during the Cold War the first republic adopted a 'low profile' foreign policy. The second section seeks to attribute this low profile to the anti-system (anti-market and anti-NATO) stance of the Italian Communist Party, rather than to the constraints of the bipolar international system. The third part describes post-1994 foreign policies of the two coalitions (broadly, the right and the left) as consistent with either neo-conservative ideology or the convergence between conservative and 'constructivist' political cultures.

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## Italian Foreign Policy after the Cold War

This essay is divided into three sections. First, it presents a five-part typology of foreign policy ranks: low profile, small power, medium power, great power and superpower. Second, it tries to explain the low profile of pre-1989 Italian diplomacy. Third, it describes the evolution of Italian foreign policy after 1994.<sup>1</sup> A right-wing coalition led by Berlusconi governed in 1994, from 2001 to 2006, and is currently in power following victory in the recent 2008 elections. Left-wing coalitions led by Prodi lasted from 1996 to 2001 and from 2006 to 2008. In 1995-96, there was a centrist government led by a 'techno- politician', Lamberto Dini.

Decisions in foreign policy concern two main areas: military and economic. In the military area, they deal with arms and disarmament issues, and war or peace-keeping operations. In the economic area, they are concerned with foreign economic policy, which, for a country like Italy, can be sub-divided into three levels: first, EU decision-making process in matters such as Economic and Monetary Union (EMU); second, diplomatic initiatives towards advanced or developing countries, increasingly directed at economic goals (currently, most institutional visits to foreign countries include meetings with local businessmen); and third, development co-operation, through which foreign aid is channelled to third world countries, usually by the Foreign Affairs Minister.

### A typology on the ranks of foreign policy

In the following typology, foreign policy ranks are classified into five categories: low profile (LP), small (sP), middle power (MP), great power (GP), and superpower (SP):

<i>Variables</i>	LP	sP	MP	GP	SP
(a) coherence in alliance policy	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
(b) inter/regional selectivity	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>
(c) multilateral (regional) mobilisation capability	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
(d) infra/regional selectivity	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>
(e) effectiveness of diplomatic support and foreign aid	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
(f) inclusion in relevant arenas of concert of powers	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
(g) consistency between economic and military resources	-	-	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
(h) governance efforts in foreign countries' politics	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
(i) governance effectiveness in foreign countries' politics	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>
(l) different capabilities in military resources	see the text				

Low profile foreign policy is characterised by an ambiguous definition of alliances (a), for example, through the presence of both pro-West and pro-third world attitudes. During the Cold War, Italy's diplomatic attitude was somewhat schizophrenic. The official foreign policy was the orthodox one, with anchorage to both NATO and the European Community (EC), but there was also a parallel (and 'underground') heterodox diplomacy, which grew out of (neutralist, third-worldist and pro-Arab) positions adopted from the late 1950s by ENI (*Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi*) President Mattei, and then by leftist Christian Democrat leaders, Fanfani, Moro and Andreotti.

<sup>1</sup> Drawing heavily on Fossati (1999).

Within the EC, Italy always delegated its decisions to the main partners (especially Germany and France) and never followed EC commitments to keep public spending under control. There was no coherent synthesis between the orthodox and the subterranean levels of foreign policy. Something similar occurred in Franco's Spain (Fossati 2000).

A feature of a small power is its ability to establish a priority of diplomatic preferences among all the geographic regions (Asia, Eastern Europe, Mediterranean, Latin America, and so on), overcoming the chaotic approach of low profile foreign policy (b). Before 1994, Italy did not establish priorities in either its diplomatic support of (private and public) domestic firms operating in foreign countries or development co-operation. Its diplomatic missions and foreign aid were the outcome of a chaotic decision-making process, without any inter-regional selectivity. In a nutshell, the label of 'small' power does not concern the (limited) geographical or demographic dimension of a country (Vital 1967, Ingebritsen 2006). Belgium, Netherlands, Austria are small powers, because since 1945 they have always satisfied the two above-mentioned analytic conditions.

Italy became a small power after 1989. On the one hand, the heterodoxies of the past (in both NATO and EU) were overcome; in both cases, Italian institutions stopped delegating decisions to their main partners. Italy was involved in several peace-keeping operations (in Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon), and finally was successful in keeping government spending under control, reaching the Maastricht Treaty targets and entering EMU. On the other hand, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean emerged as its geo-economic priorities, in terms of both diplomatic support to economic operators abroad and foreign aid (more on this below).

The concept of middle power has been used in the literature as an ambiguous intermediate level, with limited anchorage to standardised indicators (Holbraad 1984, Wood 1987, Cooper, et al 1993). The main feature of a middle power is its multilateral mobilisation capability (c), through the organisation of regional conferences that are symbolic, but are especially aimed at reinforcing economic ties, such as the UK with the Commonwealth (Martin and Garnett 1997). Neither Spain nor Italy have that capability, even if at the beginning of the 1990s they tried to organise a conference for co-operation and security in the Mediterranean. Another difference between small and middle powers is the perception by the latter of the impossibility of maintaining high-level diplomatic and economic contacts with all the countries of a privileged region (d). A middle power prefers selectivity, concentrating its priorities in some partners of the preferred zone: for example, former French colonies within Africa (Aldrich and Connell 1989), or Maghreb countries within the Mediterranean for Spain, or (potentially) Balkan states within Eastern Europe for Italy. The effectiveness of diplomatic support and foreign aid (e) is much higher for a middle power, whose national firms get many more contracts, for example, than those of a small power. Finally, small powers are excluded from the important arena of the concert of powers (f), such as the European troika of France, Germany and the UK. Italy was excluded from the Contact Group for the former Yugoslavia. In sum, France, Germany (since the *Ost-Politik* initiatives of the 1970s; Cordell and Wolff 2007) and the UK are middle powers, while Italy is a small power. Spain is still in a 'grey area' between the two ranks, because it has mobilisation capability only in Latin America (through *Las Cumbres Iberoamericanas*) and infra-regional selectivity only

in the Mediterranean. Spain is also not in the 'Group of 8', though Italy and Canada have a limited role within it, while it is the 'Group of 5' (USA, UK, France, Germany and Japan) that can be considered as the inner core of economic powers (Fossati 2000).

In the literature, great powers have been traditionally conceptualised as those of a multipolar international structure, and no standardised analytic categories have emerged for them under bipolarity (Neack 1995, Miller 2007). A great power can intensify its relations with all the countries of the region (d), like the USA in Latin America; it has inter-regional, but not infra-regional selectivity. Moreover, both super- and great powers can exercise 'governance' capabilities, trying to manage economic or political crises (in market transition and democratisation processes), and to resolve 'cultural' (i.e. inter-civilisation or inter-nation) armed conflicts in their privileged regions (h). The European powers' attempts at governance in their former African colonies were weak, and many of those conflicts remain unresolved, even if wars have practically ended (for example, Spain in Western Sahara, France in Rwanda and Cote d'Ivoire, Italy in Somalia, Portugal in Angola and Mozambique, Netherlands in East Timor, Belgium in Rwanda, Burundi and Congo). The exceptions were the UK in Sierra Leone and Australia in East Timor, which showed some governance capability within UN-sponsored attempts at resolving those conflicts. In sum, small and middle powers have low governance capabilities and rarely engage in mediation efforts; sometimes, they merely seek to stop violence. Mediation efforts of single diplomats of small powers are often more effective, such as those of Norwegian diplomats in the Israel-Palestinian and Sri Lankan conflicts.

Russia is experiencing an anomalous situation, like that of a former great power (Rumer 2007). It has maintained governance capability in its geo-political sphere of influence: for example, by sending its troops to Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan. In all those conflicts, Russia has not acted as a 'neutral' actor, but as a partisan supporter of its allies. Furthermore, Russia's economic resources are very low, as the difficulties of its market transition process show: the coercion applied to the EU in the natural resources (especially oil and gas) trade is a ploy to conceal those difficulties. There is inconsistency between economic and military resources (g), thus a potential rank of great power is neutralised. Russia is neither a great, nor a medium, but only a small power. Germany, France and the UK have lower governance capability, but their consistency between military and economic resources is higher; thus, they are middle powers.

By contrast, the superpower category has been linked in the literature to a standardised analytic category (Neack 1995, Lieber 2001). In this view, the difference between a great power and a superpower lies in the superior range of action of the latter, whose geo-political frontiers are 'global'; thus, there is no inter-regional selectivity, because some areas (Africa, parts of Asia) are considered marginal (b). The USSR became a great power after the Cuban crisis in 1962. The USA maintained a superpower attitude until the retreat from Vietnam during the Cold War, and then until the failed intervention in Somalia at the beginning of the 1990s. Now it is a great power. Superpower governance is more effective than that of a great power (i). For example, the recent US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan have had only a partial success, like the coercion applied to Chavez in Venezuela and Castro in Cuba.

The last variable concerns the mobilisation of military resources. Low profile diplomacies do not plan any military initiative because of their inconsistent foreign policy. Small powers (like Italy) engage in peace-keeping operations; middle powers (like France and the UK) support the military interventions of great power or superpowers. The difference between great and super powers does not concern their military capability for destruction, but the selective or global geographical range of their operations.

### **Trying to explain Italy's low profile during the Cold War**

The analytical set of foreign policy ranks is essential for descriptive purposes and is the premise for any attempt at generalisation. The low profile of Italian diplomacy has been the object of debate among political scientists and historians, out of which two main hypotheses emerged: one emphasised the role of the Communist party (*Partito Comunista Italiano* or PCI), the other focused on the bipolar international structure. This essay sets out to test these hypotheses, particularly through a comparison with Spanish foreign policy.

In the 1950s, centre-right governments led by De Gasperi took the basic foreign policy decisions to enter the Western coalition and its institutions, NATO and the European Economic Community (EEC). After this juncture, Italy's role remained limited, with little involvement of Italian politicians in EEC decision-making processes (in the 1960s, an Italian politician, Malfatti, even declined the Commission presidency). At the same time, Italy's participation in NATO was even more ambiguous, with constant delegation of decisions to the USA. Official declarations of the leaders of centre-left coalition governments were pro-Atlantic, but at the same time there was an 'underground' and heterodox foreign policy, which developed out of the neutralist and third-worldist positions of some domestic delegates. The initiatives of Mattei, the president of the public company ENI in the late 1950s, with many energy (mostly oil) agreements with Arab and communist states, became famous throughout the West.<sup>2</sup> Italy oriented its foreign policy towards the constant search for compromises, which continued in the 1960s, when the leftist wing defeated its conservative foe within the main government party, the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC). Development cooperation was channelled without any inter-regional selectivity, through the so-called '*dispersione a pioggia*'; most decisions on aid were delegated to the Catholic Church or to leftist NGOs. Finally, Italy was one of the few western countries unable even to organise diplomatic missions to support (public and private) firms' investments in and exports to foreign countries, damaging medium and small-sized enterprises. Large companies like Fiat and Olivetti had their own diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mattei's ENI signed several agreements with both moderate and radical Arab countries, in order to reduce Italian dependence from oil imports; something similar occurred in eastern Europe (especially the USSR), concerning gas trade. Those initiatives were criticised by the Anglo-Saxon multinationals (the so-called 'Seven Sisters') and by the US government. ENI's increased budget was also used to corrupt Italian politicians, especially those of the leftist wing of *Democrazia Cristiana*, who favoured Mattei's diplomacy and continued it after his death in 1962.

<sup>3</sup> There is also economic support to private and public firms operating in foreign countries. SACE (*Sezione Autonoma per i crediti all'Esportazione*) is the public insurance body to protect exports and investments in 'risky' developing countries, while SIMEST (*Società Italiana per le imprese miste all'estero*) channels credits to national firms operating abroad (once this task was accomplished by *Mediocredito*). ICE (*Istituto del commercio estero*) is responsible for foreign trade information,

In the 1980s, there were important changes, and the policy of delegation to the USA was abandoned. Italy participated in important military initiatives in the Mediterranean (Lebanon, Red Sea operations). However, Prime Minister Bettino Craxi (leader of the *Partito Socialista Italiano*, PSI) crystallised conflict with the USA in the *Achille Lauro* crisis, by allowing Palestinian terrorists to escape.<sup>4</sup> The defence of terrorists is incompatible with the values of the Western alliance, while it is coherent with a third-worldist strategy. In EC policy too, some changes took place in the 1980s. Politicians like Andreotti (of the leftist wing of the DC) and Craxi participated more actively in inter-governmental negotiations.<sup>5</sup> However, Rome's public deficit remained very high in those years (at a two-digit level, incompatible with EMU obligations<sup>6</sup>), in contrast to countries such as Spain which had recently joined the EC, but whose public expenditure was much better managed. Thus, Italian First Republic politicians were always very 'European' in their words and very nationalistic in their deeds, resisting the control of government spending. Italy was still considered an unreliable partner in both NATO and the EC. The 1980s were a decade of only partial, and limited changes in foreign policy, and Italy's diplomacy could be still considered low profile, not that of a small power.

Italy abandoned its low profile only in the 1990s, when the leftist Prodi government complied with the Maastricht treaty targets,<sup>7</sup> and Italian armed forces started to have a more coherent role in NATO, participating in several peace-keeping missions in Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon.<sup>8</sup> After 1994, under the Berlusconi

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especially to small and medium-sized firms. All these public institutions are supervised by the Economy ministries, while decisions on foreign aid are taken by the Foreign Affairs ministry, through the general direction of economic affairs (DGAE) and especially the general direction of development co-operation (DGCS). Several reform attempts, aimed at establishing an Italian aid agency have failed so far, because of the objections of the Foreign Affairs minister. After 1994, both left- and right-wing governments established some co-ordination bodies, in order to facilitate communication between the ministries of Economy and Foreign Affairs, whose organisational cultures are very different.

<sup>4</sup> Santoro (1991) emphasised positively Italy's independence from the USA in that crisis, showing a misunderstanding of the basic dimensions of an alliance policy, which define power ranks – see the previous paragraphs.

<sup>5</sup> Ferrera (1991) emphasised that in the 1980s Italy had abandoned delegation to its main European partners.

<sup>6</sup> Italian public expenditure increased dramatically in the 1980s (Verzichelli 1999).

<sup>7</sup> In that period some ambiguities (typical of a low profile diplomacy) remained, even if only in the short term. In mid-1994, Berlusconi chose to enter the EMU with the first group of 'Euro' countries, through a *Finanziaria* based on tough public expenditure cuts (through pensions reform), but after conflict with the leftist parties and unions, he had to deeply revise his economic programme. Thus, EMU targets were not reached and in that period Berlusconi's attitude towards the Maastricht treaty was not clear. However, he was soon (in late 1994) forced to leave the government, due to the defection of the *Lega Nord* (Northern League). At the beginning (in mid-1996), Prodi too had an ambiguous attitude towards EMU. He initially elaborated a plan to join EMU a year later, together with Spain, Portugal and Ireland. But when Prodi proposed this solution to Aznar at Valencia in the autumn of 1996, the Spanish prime minister rejected that scenario. Aznar's decision pushed Prodi to apply a tougher economic adjustment in order to reach Maastricht targets. This was the indicator that Italy had achieved the small power rank.

<sup>8</sup> Italy did not participate in wars, except a limited involvement in the Kuwait, Bosnia and Kosovo military interventions. Rome's armed forces were strongly involved in peace-keeping operations. This choice is typical of a small power. The only difference between right- and left-wing governments concerned the 2003 USA military intervention against Iraq. Berlusconi did not send any troops to Iraq, but politically supported (with Aznar's Spain) the war, unlike the Prodi government, which joined the Franco-German coalition.

government, diplomatic support to national firms<sup>9</sup> and development cooperation<sup>10</sup> was channelled to selected areas, namely Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. Similar changes had not taken place either in the 1980s or in the two technical governments of Amato and Ciampi in the early 1990s. Those two governments had begun a process of tough economic adjustment, which was not completed. These were the years of the so-called *Tangentopoli*, or ‘Clean Hands’ scandal, which saw the trials of corrupt politicians of the ‘First Republic’; therefore, any diplomatic contact with business exporters and investors was discouraged. The trials also involved the Italian diplomats, and foreign aid was drastically cut.<sup>11</sup>

The first hypothesis explaining Italy’s low profile was proposed by the historian Di Nolfo (1977): he saw a linkage between foreign and domestic policy through the anti-system nature of the main leftist party. In domestic politics, the conflict between the centre-left government coalition and the anti-system opposition of the PCI had become deeply entrenched.<sup>12</sup> Italian communists were not a violent party (the only group with that ideology was the terrorist *Brigate Rosse*). However, the Italian communists had a socialist political culture, with a strong anti-market, anti-West and anti-NATO (that is to say anti-American) attitude. That conflict was resolved through compromise and Italy established a consensual democracy,<sup>13</sup> the outcome of the deep incompatibility of values (the ‘meta-policies’). According to Cotta (1994), it was impossible to implement any middle-range reform; only micro-policies (the *leggine* or ‘little laws’) were approved by parliament, through a long inter-party mediation process. The metaphor of Italian politics during the Cold War became the title of Di Palma’s 1977 essay, ‘Surviving without governing’.

In foreign policy, the low profile was the outcome of the intentional choice of DC leaders to minimise (and prevent) conflict with the PCI, which did not recognise some

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<sup>9</sup> Another change concerned the active participation (since Berlusconi’s visit in Russia in 1994) of businessmen in diplomatic missions, a practice that was almost absent during the First Republic, except for some chaotic (and mostly symbolic) initiatives, which had started in the 1980s. In diplomatic support to economic operators, both coalitions promoted the two regions, but with a different ‘top priority’: the Mediterranean for the right and Eastern Europe for the left. During the Prodi government, an undersecretary of the foreign affairs ministry (Fassino) was given responsibility for relations with Eastern Europe.

<sup>10</sup> Here is the list of priority countries for receipt of Italian funding (in millions of dollars) in 1995-99: Mozambique 369,1; Ethiopia 296,0; Bosnia 177,2; Albania 159,2; Malta 148,1; Argentina 121,0; Morocco 113,2; Eritrea 112,1; Egypt 109,2; Jordan 93,1. Some African countries (Congo, Uganda, Madagascar) received extraordinary funds for emergency situations. Convergence between the right and the left also depended on the fact that some Mediterranean countries which are a source of immigration (blocking this is close to the conservative platform) are also ex-communist, Albania and Bosnia. Some African states (Ethiopia, Eritrea) are former colonies, thus consistent with the conservative platform; aid to Somalia was stopped, because Italy was marginalised owing to its support for Barre. Others like Mozambique are post-communist; the choice of such countries was coherent with the constructivist model. Argentina is still favoured over other Latin American states, because of the high percentage of Italian immigrants, consistent with the conservative platform.

<sup>11</sup> This was also the outcome of a ‘partitioning’ practice, the so-called *lottizzazione*, through which single parties (and not the institutions) managed development co-operation with third world countries. For example, only the Christian Democrat party (and not the FAM) negotiated with Ethiopia, the Socialist party with Somalia, the Communist party with some Marxist regimes of Africa, Angola, Mozambique, and Tanzania. This anomalous practice greatly favoured corruption.

<sup>12</sup> Sartori (1976) describes the Italian party system as polarised and as extreme multi-polarism.

<sup>13</sup> Consensual democracy saw the involvement of the PCI in the late 1970s and especially during the 1980s (Pizzorno 1993).



values of the western alliance, such as free market institutions and participation in NATO, because of its anti-Americanism (La Palombara 1989). Italian activities in the EC and NATO were always characterised by a strategy of ‘under-statement’ and delegation to its main foreign partners. In 1977 (during its external support of grand coalition ‘*compromesso storico*’ governments and the international *detente* under US President Carter) the PCI accepted both NATO and the EC (Putnam 1977), but their positions were not consistent with events in the 1980s, when USA-USSR relations deteriorated. The PCI showed that it had not abandoned anti-system positions. In the 1980s, the Italian communists (unlike other European left parties) were against the European Monetary System and NATO’s Euro-missiles. It softly criticised the USSR in the Afghan war and Korean jumbo jet crises. Only after 1989, was there a change of values (and behaviour) of the PCI, which became the *Partito democratico della sinistra* (PDS). Thus, Italy achieved the rank of small power.<sup>14</sup>

This hypothesis is confirmed by empirical evidence from the analysis of Spain under Franco, a regime where an anti-system party was in power. Franco’s foreign policy was also low profile. Franco strengthened relations with populist South American leaders and many (moderate and radical) Arab governments. Rightist authoritarian Spain’s definition of alliances was still ambiguous, something in between the west and the Third World. Thus, the colour of the (fascist or communist) ideology is not relevant in defining its ambiguous attitude towards foreign policy. After Spain’s democratic transition, Gonzalez quickly abandoned the low profile. His leftist party’s ideology was social-democrat (as in Germany, France and the UK) and not socialist like that of the PCI (Fossati 2000).<sup>15</sup> It is tangible behaviours, and not labels which parties apply to themselves, which matter in defining a party’s political culture.

There is an alternative hypothesis concerning Italy’s low profile foreign policy, the so-called ‘Pasquino theorem’ (1974). According to this, Italy’s low profile is attributable to international factors, namely the influence of the cold war on the FP of Italy and other European countries. To verify this claim we need to analyse the foreign policies of other European countries during the Cold War. If they were not characterised by low profile, this would mean that the domestic (and not the international) hypothesis just put forward withstands the empirical test. Indeed, other scholars like Panebianco (1997) have shown convincingly that no other European country had a low profile, though conditioned by the same external pressure as Italy during the Cold War. This situation obtained not only for France and the UK - both permanent members in the UN Security Council - and for Germany, which increased

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<sup>14</sup> Coralluzzo (2000) over-emphasised the policy declarations of the PCI, and characterised the 1980s as the decade of the ‘emerging profile’. Isernia (1996) inverted the causal chain: in his view, the PCI’s position was dependent on its exclusion from government. The above-mentioned radicalisation in the 1980s would have been the outcome of the end of the so-called ‘*compromesso storico*’ executive in the late 1970s. In reality, this came about not because of domestic factors, but as a consequence of the increasing polarisation of USA-USSR relations under the Reagan administration. In fact, the PCI left the grand coalition of the late 1970s because of the still existing deep conflict over foreign policy.

<sup>15</sup> D’Alema (and not Occhetto) was the main promoter of the ideological change of the PCI. The imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981 was the premise for the break (‘*strappo*’) with Moscow in 1982. However, PCI leaders (Natta and Occhetto) wanted, like Gorbachev, the ‘democratic reform of communism’, but basically remained socialists, or better, ‘neo-communists’ (Urban 1995). After the split of the PDS, two ‘neo-communist’ parties remained: *Rifondazione Comunista*, whose main leader is Bertinotti, and another (more moderate) small party, *Comunisti Italiani*. In fact, this anti-system ideology is basically the socialist-manichean one, shared by the Italian Green party (*Verdi*), characterised by anti-American, anti-market and anti-western values.

its rank with *Ost-Politik*, but also for Belgium, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian states, which all had more coherent diplomacies. Also democratic Spain was a small power during the remainder of the Cold War. Spain was a junior partner, as it had entered the EC only in 1986, and thus had a more limited negotiating role, though Madrid's government state finances were much better managed (with a deficit/Gross Domestic Product rate around 3.5%) than Italy's. Furthermore, Spanish participation in NATO was not characterised by ambiguity, such as the Achille Lauro crisis.<sup>16</sup> In foreign economic policy, Spain has always prioritised diplomatic support and development co-operation towards Latin America and, within the Mediterranean, the Maghreb.<sup>17</sup>

Some scholars have recently criticised the positions of both right-wing and left-wing Italian governments, such as Berlusconi's criticism of European institutions' decision to introduce the euro<sup>18</sup> and Prodi's withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq. However, these two positions were not linked to low profile diplomacy, because they did not affect the coherence of the Italian policy of alliance with the EU or NATO. First, the rightist government's stance towards the EU was motivated by domestic political goals, namely to gain some electoral consensus after the inflationary effects of the euro. Italy did not make any significant objections concerning the European institutions, nor did it ask to re-negotiate its international obligations. Berlusconi's coalition partner, the *Lega Nord*, is the only rightist Italian party that is anti-European

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<sup>16</sup> Spain defined its participation in NATO through a referendum; in fact, no nuclear missiles were deployed in its territory, which was in any case not of comparable importance strategically as Italy and Germany were, being closer to the USSR. There were limited (and mostly cultural) conflicts with the USA over the Falklands war between the UK and Argentina, and the 1989 American military intervention in Panama. Spain did not go so far as to condemn the UK's action in the UN General Assembly. Spanish verbal protests against the US military intervention in Panama were limited to stating the symbolic principle of solidarity among Iberian regimes.

<sup>17</sup> Other hypotheses have been put forward, but none were confirmed by empirical evidence. Panebianco (1982) stressed the low centralisation of the Italian governments. Thus, Italian foreign policy will change only after a constitutional reform based on improved governmental powers through semi-presidentialism or the direct election of the prime minister (the *premierato*). The philosopher La Torre (1996) proposed a model of the 'Italian ideology', characterised by compromise decision outcomes, which is found throughout the history of Italian political thought, be it realism (Machiavelli), liberalism (Croce) or Marxism (Gramsci). The basic features of the Italian ideology are as follows. Human actions are instrumental. Human actions are conflictive. There is no rationality in the goals. Normative arguments represent coercive tricks or self-illusions, because ethics is perverse or not important. Truth is a pragmatic concept, because success is the 'key' of truth. Thought depends on practices and philosophy is the instrument employed to manipulate events. Ends always justify means. History is just a matter of 'ex post' legitimisation. Any ethical criticism is labelled as too rigorous, moralist and hypocritical. The public sphere depends on and is colonised by the private one. Rules and norms are subject to politics and the economy, because norms are fictions. Politics is passion, will and force, and is conditioned by the friend/enemy cleavage: politics and economy are 'family affairs'. General interventions are not implemented; particularistic and pragmatic decisions always prevail. Other scholars have linked the low profile to the central role of the *Democrazia Cristiana* in the Italian party system. A fourth, alternative explanation was based on the absence of charismatic leaders in FP, that is to say of politicians with specific attitudes towards international relations. Finally, some scholars have emphasised the influence of the low 'state autonomy' in foreign economic policy, that would reduce governments' strength. In Italy, the influence of organised business was limited also in the domestic political economy; state autonomy was low because of the parties' influence, and not of business lobbying.

<sup>18</sup> See: Andreatta, Brighi (2003), Ignazi (2004), Brighi (2006, 2007bis). Criticism of the left's coherence in NATO was advanced by the leaders of the right opposition. For the Italian foreign policy changes, see also Walston (2007).

– because it is anti-system –, but it did not play any major role in the main foreign policy decisions of the Berlusconi government.<sup>19</sup>

Second, Prodi's decision to end the Italian peace-keeping mission in Iraq did not compromise the coherence of Italy's alliance policy within NATO. In fact, Berlusconi's rightist executive had already decided to withdraw the peace-keeping troops; thus, differences concerned rather the timing of the operation and the style of the declarations. However, the pre-emptive 2003 war was far more strikingly divergent from usual NATO practices, than Italy's decision to withdraw its troops. The US decision to invade Iraq provoked strong conflict within NATO and strategic partners like Germany or France neither supported it, nor sent any peace-keeping mission after the end of the official war. Moreover, in summer 2006, Italy decided to play a significant role in the peace-keeping mission in Lebanon, strongly supported by the Bush administration. More plausibly, the (anti-American, and anti-system) *Rifondazione Comunista* party's push for the withdrawal of the peace-keeping mission from Afghanistan would entail an incoherent decision, which could have very negative effects on the credibility of Italian diplomacy within NATO.

These two episodes do not represent any major change in the 'small-power' diplomacy of Italy. They seem rather to exemplify the ideological cleavage that is still very evident in Italian politics, and especially in Italy's foreign policy. They also represent empirical evidence confirming the low profile theory discussed earlier, a profile which could re-emerge if Italy is influenced in the future by anti-system parties, such as the anti-American *Rifondazione Comunista* (even if following the 2008 election, it is no longer in parliament) and the anti-European *Lega Nord*, whose positions are not compatible with Italy's participation in NATO and the EU. The likelihood of Italy shifting towards a middle power rank is still small. It seems unlikely that Italy could play any major regional role in the Mediterranean,<sup>20</sup> while a more intensive infra-regional selectivity could emerge in its FEP, especially towards the Balkan area.<sup>21</sup> The main problem in this sense concerns the effectiveness of Italy's diplomatic support and foreign aid, which has remained low, especially if compared to that of countries like Germany. Finally, Italy is likely to be excluded in the future from the main governance arena, e.g. from the European troika and the informal G5.

### **The ideological dimension of Italian foreign economic policy**

<sup>19</sup> That limited effect of the supposed right 'anti-Europeanism' was supported by Croci (2007). In sum, during the rightist government, the only important decision was the European constitution, which was not rejected because of Italian opposition. In that period, the European integration process was simply frozen. Italy, together with some other founding members (Germany and France), just slowed control over the 3% public deficit/GDP rate; this occurred, again, for domestic political goals, i.e. gaining electoral consensus.

<sup>20</sup> In September 1990, the joint Italian and Spanish proposal for a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) failed for various reasons, most notably the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Moreover, Israel has always rejected any proposal for a regional conference, because of its minority position with respect to Arab states. The Italian foreign affairs minister was the socialist De Michelis, who also promoted a multilateral initiative in the Balkan area, which failed because of the charges against De Michelis for corruption.

<sup>21</sup> This priority was emphasised by Berlusconi, but mostly with reference to the NATO enlargement process, whose loose approach has been supported by both right- and left-wing Italian governments (Menotti 2001). Naturally, a rigid approach to enlargement (and especially to political conditionality) is more compatible with liberalism. Also within the EU, Italy has promoted a loose approach, in order to facilitate enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria.

The descriptive analysis of foreign policy is facilitated by the use of four diplomatic models, linked to the main Western political cultures: conservative, liberal, constructivist/social democrat and Manichean/socialist. Political scientists have disregarded the role of ideas in foreign policy,<sup>22</sup> because of their emphasis on the constraining influence of realism and their consequent focus on the role of interests.<sup>23</sup> The conservative model corresponds to the strategy of promoting interests which are linked to the nationalist ideology. For example, Italian foreign policy should focus on strategic countries, like those of the Mediterranean, because of the following interests: guaranteed oil imports, control of immigration to Italy, and the fight against Islamic fundamentalism. Also compatible with a conservative foreign policy is a priority for former colonies. Liberalism focuses on values, trying to strengthen contacts only with countries that respect democracy (and human rights), national self-determination and which apply market reforms, like those of Eastern Europe, many in Latin America, and India. Before 1989, liberalism was sacrificed to Cold War imperatives, and the 'lesser evil' priority (for military, and not communist regimes) emerged in US diplomacy.

The socialist model emphasises 'Manichean' ideas, like third-worldism, anti-Americanism, anti-west and anti-capitalism, privileging ties with Cuba, North Korea and radical Islamic countries like Iran. The social-democrat/constructivist<sup>24</sup> platform is based on privileged relations with post-communist countries of Eastern Europe or with the poorest countries – to be favoured through foreign aid by a global redistribution of wealth. After 1989, the main ideological dimension of this political culture is 'political correctness', which is rooted in the effort to make equal what is different, favouring the under-privileged, by stressing multicultural values in tensions with third world immigrants, in ethnic conflict resolution processes (on the lines of the Dayton formula of a pluri/national Bosnian state). For example, some Italian (Rutelli, D'Alema, Fassino) and European (Blair) leftist politicians promote EU enlargement to Turkey, because of the strong appeal of a 'pluri/religious' (and not only Christian) Europe.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The few exceptions were Keohane and Goldstein (1993) and Katzenstein (1996). For example, Hill (2003) has shown how competing versions of the national interest are linked to ideologies and values. The role of ideologies has been more emphasised in political economy research; Esping-Andersen (1990) has elaborated three (conservative, liberal and social-democrat) welfare models. In general, the role of (conservative and liberal) political cultures in foreign policy has been emphasised only in case studies, especially of the USA (Guzzini 1998). The increasing role of the above-mentioned ideologies in international relations after the Cold War has been emphasised in Fossati (2006a).

<sup>23</sup> In fact, the relation between interests and ideas is much more complex. Liberal, constructive and Manichean leftist political cultures begin with ideas (respectively: the defence of civil rights, welfare state and multi-culturalism, anti-Americanism and anti-liberalism) and then consolidate interests (of all those NGOs and lobbies trying to promote them). Instead, conservatism starts with defending collective interests and then crystallises (nationalist) values that are naturally plural and not univocal (Fossati 2006, 2006a).

<sup>24</sup> See Von Hayek's and Galtung's conceptions, who emphasised an 'enlightening' attitude of the moderate left, that is willing to 'construct' an alternative politics, according to its values. In Italian, the concept of reformism is used, but this term is not correct, as many reforms are also enacted by the right. On the diplomatic models, see: Fossati (2006).

<sup>25</sup> Also the main rightist politicians (Berlusconi and Fini) supported Turkey, because of the neo-con ideology mentioned in the text. Turkey is perceived as a strategic moderate Islamic country. Its economic **and political** stabilisation, thanks to its entrance in the EU, would supposedly defeat the advance of religious fundamentalism in the Middle East. Some politicians of *Forza Italia* (Pera), *UDC*

These four diplomatic models will be applied to the evolution of post-1994 Italian foreign economic policy. Foreign policy in the field of security can be better understood according to the typology on the diplomatic ranks: see the conclusions. Analysis of post-1994 Italian foreign economic policy shows that the conservative-realist platform has been widely followed, together with the constructivist (post/communist and politically correct) one. Italian foreign economic policies focused on Eastern Europe and Mediterranean countries, where interests and ideas are compatible. Multi-cultural (pro Islamic and pro post-communist states) values were coherent with the interests of maintaining good relations with both Mediterranean (because of oil imports, prevention of immigration, fight against religious fundamentalism) and Eastern European countries, where small and medium firms are investing in cheap wage economies like Romania.

No post-1994 Italian government has ever supported a liberal orientation in foreign economic policy, for example by privileging more democratic (with a better human rights record) or more (economically) liberal governments of the third world. There has often been a sort of 'anti-liberal' foreign economic policy: no Italian executive has ever applied political conditionality to foreign aid.<sup>26</sup> The collective culture of the indeed very Machiavellian diplomats of the Farnesina may have played some role in the adoption of this policy.

There were many diplomatic contacts with Middle Eastern countries, especially through the foreign affairs minister of the first Prodi government, Dini, who had previously been the economy minister of the right; thus, his political culture is deeply conservative. He reaffirmed his anti-liberal stance at the foreign affairs ministry, privileging those authoritarian countries (Libya, Iran, Iraq, North Korea) that had been considered pariahs during the Cold War. These privileged economic relations with so-called rogue states testified to the important role in foreign economic policy played by public companies, like ENI, which signed important energy agreements in Asian (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan) and Mediterranean states. In fact, these are countries where Anglo-Saxon multi-nationals have always been politically constrained by US governments (see also Telecom's troubled investments in Serbia, because of the corruption scandal).<sup>27</sup> To conclude, Prodi's leftist coalition brought about the above-mentioned convergence between the conservative and constructivist diplomatic models: a new sort of *compromesso storico*, this time in foreign economic policy.

The post-2001 rightist government confirmed this anti-liberal stance in both Eastern Europe (enjoying privileged relations with Putin's Russian hybrid regime,<sup>28</sup> with illiberal Ukraine -suspected of illegal nuclear arms trade with Iraq - and with

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(Buttiglione) and *Margherita* have promoted a liberal approach, anchored to Turkey's low performance on human rights and not to cultural biases (Fossati 2008).

<sup>26</sup> For the recent evolution of Italian foreign aid, see: Carbone (2007, 2008). For the leftist diplomacy, see: Davidson (2006), Brighi (2007), Missiroli (2007), Fabbri e Piattoni (2008). For the rightist diplomacy, see: Brighi (2006, 2007, 2007a), Croci (2004, 2007), Waltson (2004, 2007), Liberti (2004-5), Romano (2006), Missiroli (2007).

<sup>27</sup> F. Tamburini 'Un mistero chiamato Telecom Serbia', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2/9/2003.

<sup>28</sup> G. Meoni 'Italia-Russia, accordo sul debito', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 18/12/2002. According to Freedom House (2008), Russia is only 'partially free'. It had a rating of 3 in 1991/2, then 4 in 1998/9, 5 in 2001/2, finally 5.5 since 2005. Ukraine was illiberal before the 'orange revolution' of 2004/5. Lukashenko's Belarus is totally authoritarian.

authoritarian Belarus) and the Mediterranean (Libya and Turkey). However, Berlusconi did not have close ties with post-Khomeini Iran. The ideological orientation of the right was neo-conservatism and not liberalism, otherwise all authoritarian regimes would have been sanctioned. The so-called neo-conservatism, which took hold especially after September 11, aims at penalising all social and political actors supporting Islamic fundamentalism. This political culture combines liberal aims (western identity, *bellum iustum*, export of democracy) with conservative unilateral strategies, with little reliance on global institutions like the UN (Fossati 2006). The definition of the main national interests to be defended by the right coalition in foreign economic policy are political (and not economic). On the one hand, anti-fundamentalist, authoritarian regimes like Libya were strongly encouraged.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, regimes characterised by radical Islam (like Iran) were marginalised. Naturally, in that case, the business interests of (especially public, like ENI) national firms were partly sacrificed, and promoted only if compatible with the political dimension of foreign policy.<sup>30</sup> This trend was already present in Berlusconi's 1994 foreign affairs minister (Martino), but was intensified after September 11. The rightist FAM attention towards the Mediterranean differed from that of the First Republic, when multilateral channels were preferred without any distinction between moderate and radical Arab countries. Martino did not attend multilateral conferences (like the one in Casablanca), and favoured 'mini-lateral' ones (like the Alexandria Forum), and privileged relations with those governments (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey), which were fighting Islamic fundamentalism – Ghedafi's Libya in that period was still far from the West.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, both left-wing governments (from 1996 to 2001 and from 2004 to 2006) established a convergence between conservatism and constructivism, while the right (in 1994 and from 2001 to 2006) was closer to neo-conservative ideology. The right privileged the political dimension of diplomacy, while the left emphasised the economic one, being more sensitive to the pressure of lobbies. Naturally, it was not a 'zero sum' game; right-wing diplomacy also supported large Italian companies' investments and exports abroad, but with the not marginal exceptions of pariah states like Iran. These examples show that both interests are 'national': the (conservative) interests of public entities like ENI or Telecom, and the (neo-con) choice to avoid contacts with promoters of Islamic fundamentalism like Iran (especially in periods of high threat like post-September 11 world politics). So, while the political cultures seem to define different national interests (Hill 2003), the compatibility between them is not always immediately evident.

However, since 1994 Italy has become a small power. First, in both the EU and NATO it has established a more coherent alliance policy, overcoming the ambiguities of the past, both by reaching the Maastricht treaty targets and by defining its security

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<sup>29</sup> G. Pelosi 'Corsa alla Libia, occasione per l'Italia', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 14/9/2003. For the chronologies of events, see the website of the Farnesina: [www.esteri.it](http://www.esteri.it). A huge effort was deployed in missions to China, which were undertaken by both Berlusconi and Prodi. Asian and Latin American partners (of large companies) remain behind Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, because small and medium-sized firms prefer to invest in closer regions, thanks to state support.

<sup>30</sup> The relation between governments and lobbies has been studied especially in American FEP. See Krasner (1978), Katzenstein (1985), Ikenberry, et al (1988).

role through peace-keeping missions (in Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon). Second, it has clearly selected its geo-economic inter-regional priorities: Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. Italy is not a middle power, because it does not have a multilateral mobilisation capability (for example in the Mediterranean) and has not worked out an infra-regional selectivity, for example the Balkan area within Eastern Europe. Furthermore, it is still excluded from important concert arenas (Group of 5, European troika, contact groups) and the effectiveness of both its diplomatic support to domestic firms and of its foreign aid is still low.

The persistence of a low profile during the Cold War was linked to the existence of a strong anti-system Communist party, whose main positions were anti-market and anti-NATO. In the 1980s the PCI opposed both the European Monetary System and the Euro-missiles. Thus, the PCI's pro-NATO declarations in the late 1970s were mostly symbolic. In fact, the PCI was 'socialist' in its behaviours. The pre-1989 Italian low profile cannot be explained by the bipolar international system, because other countries such as Spain were subject to the same constraining influence, but were already small powers during the 1980s. By contrast, Spain's foreign policy under Franco was low on consistency. In sum, the significant role of anti-system (either socialist or fascist) political cultures can explain the low profile of some European diplomacies, like that of the Italian first republic.

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